

Veteran Updates

News and updates on Veterans issues from the San Francisco VA Health Care System • February 2017

Veterans Find Healing Through Work

Veterans in the San Francisco VA Health Care System (SFVAHCS) are getting the opportunity to find meaningful work while learning to cope with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other challenges. This opportunity is connected to a study conducted by SFVAHCS researchers, called Veterans Individual Placement and Support Towards Advancing Recovery (VIP-STAR). This study assesses the effectiveness of individual job placement and support services in helping Veterans with PTSD become steady workers. Though the VIP-STAR study itself has concluded, the process of connecting Veterans to meaningful work experiences continues.

Veterans are referred to the program from the PTSD Clinic. From there, staff meet with the Veterans outside of the clinical setting to assess their interests and see what kind of work might be fulfilling for them. Then, staff reach out to local businesses to see what kind of relevant opportunities could be available to the Veterans. The staff then help Veterans prepare for job interviews, and then ultimately serve as liaisons for both the Veterans and their employers to make sure the Veterans' job experience goes as smoothly as possible.



"I love this job. This is the best job in the world!" said Gregory, of his job as a baker at The Cake Gallery.

"I think the benefits of this program are tremendous," says Kristen Hay, Employment Specialist for the San Francisco VA Health Care System. "We have seen significant PTSD symptom reduction in these Veterans who are doing work that interests them. It really improves their social ties and their confidence. It is incredibly rewarding to talk to a Veteran who may be discouraged, and then seeing that spark of hope return." Kristen notes that many Veterans in the program are particularly drawn to hands-on, creative work.

Examples of recent job placements for Veterans include a sign shop, the Tesla factory, and a mechanical shop.

One Veteran who has benefited from the VIP-STAR program is Gregory King. Gregory is an Army Veteran and a longtime Bay Area resident. Gregory fell on hard times and was homeless for a while, sleeping in his coat for two and a half years. With the help of Swords to Plowshares, Gregory was connected with the SFVAHCS's HUD/VASH program and has been living in his own San Francisco apartment since May 2014.

With the encouragement of his VA primary care provider, Gregory entered the VIP-STAR program last year. Gregory's background and skills in the culinary arts made him a perfect fit for The Cake Gallery, where he has been baking cakes for the last six months. "I love this job. This is the best job in the world," said Gregory. "I'm having fun."

If you'd like to learn more about these work opportunities, talk to your VA provider, or reach out directly to Kristen Hay at 415-519-7950 or Kristen.Hay@va.gov.

Attention: Veterans Authorized to Travel with MV Transportation

The San Francisco VA Health Care System (SFVAHCS) patient transportation contract with MV Transportation has ended, and a new contract with Owl Inc. Transportation has begun effective February 1, 2017.

If you have an appointment and are authorized to travel with MV, please call the Medical Center Travel Office at (415) 750-2116 to make your reservation. You may reserve your ride 7 days in advance but no later than 24 hours before your appointment.

Remember that you must already be authorized by SFVAHCS and you must have an appointment before you may use this service.

If you have any questions or concerns about your new transportation provider, please address your calls to the Medical Center Travel Office at (415) 750-2116.

New Medication Copays

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is amending its regulation on co-payments for Veterans' outpatient medications for non-service

connected conditions.

VA currently charges non-exempt Veterans either \$8 or \$9 for each 30-day or less supply of outpatient medication,

and under current regulations, a calculation based on the medication of the Medical Consumer Price Index (CPI-P) would be used to determine the co-payment amount in future years.

This new regulation eliminates the formula used to calculate future rate increases and establishes three classes of outpatient medications identified as Tier 1, Preferred Generics; Tier 2, Non-Preferred Generics including over-the-counter medications; and Tier 3, Brand Name. Co-payment amounts for each tier would be fixed and vary depending upon the class of outpatient medication in the tier.

These co-payment amounts will be effective February 27, 2017:

- *\$5 for a 30-day or less supply - Tier 1 outpatient medication*
- *\$8 for a 30-day or less supply - Tier 2 outpatient medication*
- *\$11 for a 30-day or less supply - Tier 3 outpatient medication*

"Switching to a tiered system continues to keep outpatient medication costs low for Veterans," said VA Under Secretary for

Health (and VA Secretary nominee) Dr. David Shulkin. "Reducing their out-of-pocket costs encourages greater adherence to prescribed outpatient

medications and reduces the risk of fragmented care that results when multiple pharmacies are used; another way that VA is providing better service to Veterans."

These changes apply to Veterans without a service-connected condition, or Veterans with a disability rated less than 50 percent who are receiving outpatient treatment for a non-service connected condition, and whose annual income exceeds the limit set by law. Medication copayments do not apply to former Prisoners of War, catastrophically disabled Veterans, or those covered by other exceptions as set by law.

Co-payments stop each calendar year for Veterans in Priority Groups 2-8 once a \$700 cap is reached. More information on the new tiered medication copayment can be found at: www.va.gov/healthbenefits/cost/copy_rates.asp

